

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 05 BAGHDAD 004392

SIPDIS

STATE FOR INR/R/MR, NEA/PPD, NEA/PPA, NEA/AGS, INR/IZ, INR/P

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [KPAO](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: IRAQI GOVERNMENT, CONSTITUTION,

REFERENDUM, NATIONAL RECONCILIATION, AMR MUSA, IMAM ALI;
BAGHDAD

SUMMARY: Discussion on the Constitution, Referendum, National Reconciliation, Amr Musa, and Imam Ali were the major editorial themes of the daily newspapers on October 25, 2005 (with Regional Report from Basrah, items F-I). END SUMMARY.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- [1A. "A Scandalous TV Interview" \(Al-Fourat, 10/25](#)
- [1B. "Iraqis Have Agreed to Frank, National Dialogue" \(Al-Ittihad, 10/25\)](#)
- [1C. "A Wake Up" \(Al-Bayna, 10/25\)](#)
- [1D. "Yes to the Constitution" \(As-Sabah Al-Jadeed, 10/25\)](#)
- [1E. "ALI: The Humanity and Democracy" \(Al-Adala, 10/25\)](#)
- [1F. "A Need for National Awakening" \(Al-Manarah - Basrah, 10/20\)](#)
- [1G. "Enlightenment after Referendum" \(Al-Manarah - Basrah, 10/20\)](#)
- [1H. "Partisanship Ministries - The Work is Only for the Parties" \(Al-Hakeeka - Basrah, 10/20\)](#)
- [1I. "A Demon in the Palace" \(Al-Ashara - Basrah, 10/20\)](#)

SELECTED COMMENTARIES

[1A. "A Scandalous TV Interview"](#)
(Al-Fourat, independent, anti-coalition published this back-page editorial by Dawoud Al-Farhan)

"The live TV dialogue between U.S. President Bush and ten of his soldiers (along with an Iraqi sergeant) via satellite teleconference might have been a good addition to American democracy, except for one small problem which is that it was not a true, live dialogue. It was stage-directed by the Pentagon's Public Relations Department and the soldiers were taught answers and the President was prepped with the questions.

"American newspapers commented on the affair writing, 'The reactions of the soldiers show that Iraq is a completely stable country and Iraqis are happy and grateful to President Bush-the Iraqi Army's ability is increasing daily in spite of General Casey's statements before Congress that only one Iraqi battalion is capable of fighting without the assistance of U.S. forces.'

"One female soldier caused a scandal by saying, 'We are proud of fighting terrorists here in the north of New York,' before hesitating and correcting herself, saying, 'I mean here in the north of Iraq--in Tikrit.' The New York Times described what happened as a scandal because the soldiers memorized their answers while the President memorized his questions before the event.

"Another funny thing happened during this dialogue when the Iraqi sergeant said to Bush, 'I like you.' Bush was embarrassed because in the U.S. it is unacceptable that a man would say such a phrase to another man-it would mean something else; therefore both the president and American soldiers laughed.

"The efforts of the President's media advisors, to improve his ratings, have collapsed because his popularity in the U.S. has fallen to 32%. In Iraq also, his popularity has decreased significantly when Iraqis realized the definition of democracy and human rights in the jails of Abu Ghraib and through the destruction of Iraqi cities.

"In any case, it is not only the Iraqi sergeant (who told President Bush 'I like you'), there are many others including the popular [gay] Iraqi singer Sa'adi Al-Hili who admire American civilization."

[1B. "Iraqis Have Agreed to Frank, National Dialogue"](#)
(Al-Ittihad, affiliated with PUK led by Jalal Al-Talabani, published this page-three editorial by Abdul Hadi Mahdi)

"Iraqis are bleeding daily in large numbers and are victims

of car bombs and terrorist attacks. The silence on behalf of the world, including the Arab world, towards the crimes against Iraqis is quite strange-though Iraqis know well who is supporting the terrorist attacks, the goals behind them, and how infiltrators penetrate Iraq in order to kill Iraqis. "Iraqis have heard a lot of promises, on many occasions, of help but there has been no response to these promises. Therefore, only Iraqis are capable of stopping these attacks, through harmony and unity.

"The Arab League Secretary General's visit to Iraq and his meetings with a variety of Iraqis from all sects produced a significant development which is that everyone agrees on the necessity of national unity and the convening of a conference on national dialogue in order to save the country from crisis.

"All Iraqi factions that have faith in saving the country from aggression have announced their agreement to an Arab League initiative for national dialogue. But all of them, including the Secretary General, have established conditions for this participation, which is the exclusion of terrorists and murderers from this conference.

"The trend for frank dialogue is not new for Iraqis. Dr. Iyad Allawi led such an initiative by holding a national unity conference before the Secretary General's visit to Iraq.

"Observers will clearly see the points that Iraqis have agreed to, which in essence is national unity and a frank national dialogue in order to transform Iraq to a new phase of history and the establishment of rule of law. That's what people achieved through ballots and not bullets-instead of fighting and bleeding; that's what happened on referendum day."

1C. "A Wake Up"
(Al-Bayna - affiliated with the Hezb'allah movement in Iraq)

"The Arab League's Secretary General holds many meetings with political leaders and religious men and at the top of his list was his meeting with grand Ayatollah Al-Sistani. Musa arrived following complete silence by the Arab League toward what is happening in Iraq and came in order to ensure that Iraq maintains its Arab framework because they believe Shi'a and Kurdish leaders are not Arabs. All the flesh that was scattered in the Hillah, Baghdad and Shua'la attacks, or citizens who died on Al-A'ima Bridge, etc. haven't shaken the League's feelings!

"Why weren't they Arabs? And why shouldn't you at least send a letter of condolence to them, dear Mr. Secretary General? If they are not [Arabs], while they comprise the majority, then in what Arab framework have you come to talk about dear? We appreciate the initiative and the call for reconciliation, by those who have just woken up, but only for the sake of the weeping widows--not for the sake of the Ba'athists' barking."

1D. "Yes to the Constitution"
(As-Sabah Al-Jadeed - independent, no bias, published this page-two editorial by Sadiq Bakhan)

"By announcing preliminary results of the constitutional referendum, observers will notice the discrepancy among voter numbers in Iraqi provinces. This is normal and we should not worry or start riots and create rumors and mystery stories about the results because this is what democracy's enemies are waiting for.

"Voter turnout percentages affirming the draft constitution, among 13 [of 18] Iraqi provinces, were 80% as announced by Dr. Fareed Ayar (the head of IECI). This is considered a high percentage compared to other countries and in this way Iraqi voters have endorsed their permanent draft constitution and its principles that promote peaceful lives and inform citizens of their civic rights and duties.

"It is normal for some Iraqi voters to reject the draft constitution and vote no during the referendum. That's similar to what happened in Europe when some Europeans rejected the European constitution despite their faith in European unity; they believe that the constitution would not fulfill their ambitions which is why the European parliament decided to review several articles and consider the reasons for rejection. The attitudes of voters who reject the constitution are normal and will not lead to widespread chaos or instability as some Arab media clowns and politicians collecting [fat] pensions would like.

"Iraqis wrote a civilized constitution and even the liberal draft constitution written in 1925 did not include principles guaranteeing a decent life for Iraqis in the way this current constitution does. We wonder if the Iraqis, who under Hammurabi wrote the world's first legislation, will be

capable of writing their own social contract."

E. "ALI: The Humanity and Democracy"

(Al-Adala - affiliated with SCIRI led by Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim, no bias, published this page-three column by Dr. Ali Kholaf)

"Today, the Islamic world and free people throughout the world are commemorating the anniversary of the death of Imam Ali, who was murdered while he was kneeling in prayer in the Al-Kufa Mosque, at the criminal hands of betrayers and naysayers. We don't wish to focus on his courage and his brilliant history that raised the level of the Islamic nation, but we aim to highlight one of the important and shining facets of his political life; especially now that Iraq is undergoing democratic changes that were not new or unique to Islamic mentality that was represented by Imam Ali.

"Ali's political thoughts and initiatives were not only Islamic, but were global and humanitarian making him one of the great democrats and a source of human rights. This is not praise for his personality or casual discourse, because his heritage and history have documented that. Because of this, historians and writers in the fields of freedom and human rights, ramified in Islamic history, have described him as a democratic and humanitarian leader. Actually, the democracies of the world are small compared to his democracy.

"One of the examples of his democracy was his attitude towards his opponents--he stalled negotiations and discussions for years in order to fight his opponents. And he had the religious authority and power to do that. Another example is how he dealt with those who expelled him from the caliphate in spite of the fact he was qualified and justified to inherit the leadership [of Islam] and all of them knew that. And when the caliphate was given to someone else, Ali did not adopt a tough position or raise his sword but accepted to be a minister or counselor in the government. When the people chose him to be caliph he exercised democracy and humanity in a sublime manner, which did not appeal to his enemies who multiplied as a result.

"He didn't bargain over principles but sacrificed and fought to achieve them. He began to fight corruption and held those who profited accountable. He also accepted arbitration with Muawiya and his era and the eras that followed were characterized by injustice, cruelty and the use of the sword (in the name of Islam) in settling disputes and invading lands. In spite of the illegality of Muawiya's reign (Ali was chosen by the people), Ali complied and when the duplicity of the compromise surfaced and a group of people spilt from the Muslims he refused to fight them, in spite of his superiority, and opened negotiations resorting to military action only after he lost hope in reforming them.

"Another interesting element is that he knew his assassin (Ibn Muljam Al-Muradi). His followers asked him to kill Al-Muradi but Ali answered them, 'How can I kill my killer?' And when he was giving a speech, some of his enemies mocked him and called him names but he refused to fight them and dealt with them as regular people--he didn't want to use his power for personal revenge and control of people. One of his sayings was, 'I want to come to the power for only one reason, to achieve justice.' He visited the treasury at the end of every year to make sure it was empty because he believed the money should go to the people.

"When he walked in the streets of Kufa he told people that if they couldn't find their share of food they should seek money from the treasury. And when he would see a beggar, he became angry and allocated a salary for him from the treasury. One day he saw a poor Jew begging in the street and asked him about his needs. Some of the people rejected the beggar for being a Jew, so Imam Ali became angered and said, 'Even if he is a Jew, if he is not your brother in religion he is your brother in humanity,' and ordered a salary for him from the treasury.

"This is Ali. He is human, a ruler, a worshipper, the honest hero of Islam, so, our love for him is not sensational or an exaggeration, but for the properties he demonstrated.

"Actually, Imam Ali is bigger than the words in a column. In the words of a famous writer, 'A good writer shouldn't be regarded as good unless he has written about Ali.'"

F. "A Need for National Awakening"

(Al-Manarah (Basrah), Independent, published this front page editorial by Khalaf Al-Munshidi, on October 20)

"To support the constitution, a media campaign was conducted by 'some parties' who preyed on the suffering of people. They said that the constitution would provide security and jobs for the people and destroy terrorism. As a result,

thousands people supported the constitution without reading it, falsely seeing it as the only solution for Iraq.

"We still do not know the final result for the referendum. However, either way what happened will create great challenges for the political process in Iraq. Those responsible for 'selling' the Iraqi constitution as a solution to everyone's problems committed a big mistake. Soon, the people who supported this constitution will discover the promises of security and jobs were just mirage and can not be delivered. In the next few months, we will see continuing fighting. Attempting to amend the constitution so that it truly meets the needs of the Iraqi people must be at the top of the list for the National Assembly's schedule.

"The constitutional process took place under the objection of many Iraqis and accord to a specific American plan and timetable. This process did not allow the Iraqi people to read or discuss the constitution, as a result about 6 million Iraqis did not support the referendum which is about 40 percent of the all registered voters."

1G. "Enlightenment after Referendum"
(Al-Manarah (Basrah), Independent, published this front page editorial by Editor-in-Chief Moafaq Al-Refaie, on October 20)

"Millions of Iraqis visited referendum centers to vote either 'yes' or no on the constitution. Those who voted 'yes' did so because they want to move forward with their lives and believe that the constitution offers the best chance for Iraq to be a 'country of laws.' Those who voted 'no' did so because they fear what a future Iraq would look like under the constitution. The distinction between these two groups is how they view themselves in the new Iraq and the result of the referendum will reflect this difference. This is how democracy works."

1H. "Partisanship Ministries - The Work is Only for the Parties"
(Al-Hakeeka (Basrah), Communist Party, published a last page article by Editor-in-Chief Abbas Al-Jorani, on October 10)

"In modern society, it has become typical that political enemies substitute their features for each other; today's prey is tomorrow's predator.

"We acknowledge the difficulty in forming a new government after the last election. However, it has become clear that in creating this new government the individual ministries we created to be corrupt, feudal enterprises, ruled by and for the benefit of the powerful political parties in Iraq. They do not care about the interests of the Iraqi citizens. How quickly we have forgotten the wrongs of Saddam's regime. Depending on party affiliation and partisanship to staff and operate the national government is a bad example for the country, corrupting its laws and institutions.

"In Basrah the people have to deal with this problem if they wish to work in the government's offices. When someone asks about a vacated position, it is always 'already filled.' When you ask a new government employee how they got their job; did they apply? did they interview? They will tell you they have a confidential letter of employment, but will not show you. In reality, government officials fill these positions with party loyalists, selected from lists prepared well in advance. These days, if you want to build support for a political party, you just hire a large group of the unemployed into government jobs, thus ensuring their loyalty. So the impact of Saddam's regime is alive and well in Basrah. Here is my question: Where does someone who is not affiliated to a party go to get a job?"

1I. "A Demon in the Palace"
(Al-Ashar (Basrah), Independent, published a front page article by Editor-in-Chief Mansoor Al Kan'an, on October 13)

[The article is a satire criticizing the local Iraqi Police]

"Al Ashar newspaper heard from the Iraqi Police that there is a demon living the Palace in Bradh'eyah area. There is a TV station [IMN] that operates inside the Palace and this station reported that two \$35,000 cameras disappeared from locked cupboards inside the their offices. Investigators from the police arrived at TV Channel to investigate the crime. They tried to open the cupboards the cameras were supposedly locked within. They were unable to open the cupboards because, 'they are locked.' The said that a demon must have been responsible for the loss of the cameras and suggested the TV station ask their staff for donations."

SATTERFIELD